



## City of Cottonwood Fire & Medical Department



---

### For Immediate Release

Date: March 29, 2016  
Contacts: Mike Kuykendall, Fire Chief 928-634-2741  
Cottonwood Fire & Medical Department mkuykendall@cottonwoodaz.gov

### Fire Sprinklers-A Practical Solution to an Age Old Problem

The fire which occurred at the River Church last week is a poignant reminder of the value of automatic fire sprinkler systems in reducing fire loss in our community. While this fire started in a sub-structure attached to the building, when the fire breached the exterior wall of the church sanctuary, further flame and heat spread was stopped by the activation of a few fire sprinkler heads located in the sanctuary. If the church did not have an automatic fire sprinkler system installed, it is likely that extensive fire damage or even a complete burn of the structure would have occurred since the fire started in the middle of the night when the building was unoccupied and the probability of someone seeing early fire and smoke conditions would be much less likely.

Fire loss is an age old problem that has plagued civilization since the dawn of time. There are numerous accounts of whole towns being destroyed along with great loss of life from fire. The reality of fire is that, left unchecked, fire will grow exponentially every minute after initial ignition of a fuel source. Our buildings today are full of furnishings made from synthetic materials that burn at a much greater intensity and speed than the common combustibles that furnishings were made from 50 years ago. The best hope of stopping forward progress of a fire in its early stages is with an installed fire sprinkler system. Most fires in buildings protected by fire sprinkler systems are controlled with one or two fire sprinkler heads.

Since 2004, the City of Cottonwood has had an ordinance requiring an automatic fire sprinkler system in all new residential and most new commercial construction. Fire sprinklers have been likened to having a permanent "firefighter" on duty at all times in protected buildings. Fire sprinklers only activate when exposed to heat and flame, not when simply exposed to smoke as is frequently falsely portrayed in Hollywood productions. Fire sprinklers are designed to activate while a fire is in its early stages, controlling fire before it spreads further and also limiting the production of smoke before it can spread throughout a structure. The vast majority of fire related deaths are due to smoke inhalation, not from direct fire contact. Controlling the production of smoke, by controlling a fire early, leads to vastly increased survivability of occupants in a structure where a fire occurs.

The River Church fire is just the latest example of reduced fire loss in our community thanks to installed automatic fire sprinkler systems. Over the last ten years there have been many instances where fire sprinklers have activated in the early stages of a fire and saved buildings in our community from devastating fire loss. Included in this number are fires in at least three large apartment complexes in Cottonwood in which fire damage was limited to a single room

due to activated fire sprinklers. In each of these cases, without fire sprinklers controlling the fire in its early stages, fire loss could have extended to adjoining apartments resulting in the displacement of many residents as well as increasing the risk of injury or death due to fire and smoke inhalation.

Fire sprinklers are truly a practical solution to minimizing fire loss and improving life safety in our community.

For more information please contact Cottonwood Fire & Medical Department at 928-634-2741.